



Anything but an ordinary day Team member overcoming injury

By SANDRA HUDSON

Pop! It's a rather simple word, but the one Tracey Tapley chooses to quietly describe a sound she will not soon forget—that 'pop' led to emergency surgery and the loss of her spleen. Tracey Tapley was shot.

A hydrogeologist with the Savannah district, Tapley deployed to Afghanistan last May. She describes her assignment on the Theater Well Drilling Program as a dream job, "...go do geology stuff, in a virgin geological area. Yeah, I'll go."

She said she and her team make a huge difference in the quality of life for coalition partners. Using established data, they drill 1,500-foot borings near prospective water bearing zones, perform geophysical tests, then install the well in the best zones possible.

"If we drill wells on the bases, then we can take some of the coalition water-delivery convoys off the road and they're no longer a target," Tapley said. Targets, however, she discovered are not

limited to convoys.

It was the morning of October 17, 2010. Tapley and her co-worker, Chad Nichols, a contract hydrogeologist, were reviewing boring samples from a military base near Marjah, Afghanistan. "Command Outpost Hansen is a little strip of land in between two large cities," she said, "a blank slate."

Tapley had less than three weeks left on her six-month assignment and was planning a trip home for her niece's birth. She had also decided to come back to the drilling program for a second tour of duty saying, "It's just an extremely interesting program. The team's doing so much good."

It was just a typical day at work, she said. "I was bent over the computer to look at something and I hear something go 'pop.'"

She said they had been having electrical problems and she thought something in the tent blew up. "I jumped up and was looking for whatever had made the popping sound," Tapley said.

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Maj. Gen. Todd Semonite, SAD commander (left) and SAS commander, Col. Jeff Hall (right) welcome back Tracey Tapley (center) with the presentation of a division commander's coin. (Photo by Billy Birdwell)

Building a vital link to an otherwise inaccessible area



From his remote location at Multinational Base Tarin Kowt, the capital of Uruzgan Province in central Afghanistan, SAS team member James Myers has been there from start to finish for construction of airfield facilities providing a vital link for transporting cargo and passengers. Myers, who is a lead quality assurance representative deployed from Savannah district's Fort Gordon, Ga., resident office, is the construction representative and project engineer for a critical project supporting U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force operations. In his latest update, he reports the ribbon cutting ceremony will take place in April. The \$28.5 million project will be used by Air Mobility Command airlifters, such as C-17s and C-130s (pictured here), to bring much needed

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Desert Times

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Anything but an ordinary day

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“Then my back started hurting. Chad noticed me rubbing it and asked if I was OK. He came over and lifted the back of my shirt then said, ‘Your back is bleeding!’ and I thought, Oh, that’s not good.”

Tapley said, “While laying there waiting for help I thought, ‘Are you kidding me?’” Alone in the tent, while Nichols ran for help, Tapley began to feel ill. “The shock was starting to wear off. I had just eaten and I didn’t want to throw up. It was the Navy birthday. They had cake. They had steak and lobster. That would be rude if I got sick. The dinner was a week late, because of convoy delays,” she said.

In minutes, Tapley was surrounded by help, stabilized, and on a stretcher headed to surgery. She was transported to Camp Bastion for the operation to remove her damaged spleen and a 7.62 caliber round—one commonly used by both coalition and insurgent forces. Later investigation of the incident pointed to a firefight a mile away from her tent. “It’s a pretty large round, so I’m lucky it was at the end of its path,” Tapley said.

Tapley said she never felt in danger in Afghanistan and that the incident was random and could not have been prevented. “When you get there, the security forces give you more and more safety speeches and tell you exactly what to listen for, what you need to do and where you need to go should there be an alarm. That’s their first priority, making sure the people who aren’t used to what’s going on, know what is going on. All you have to do is listen,” she said.

Just three days after surgery, Tapley was taking small steps around the hospital at Afghanistan’s Baghrum Air Base. Oct. 22, she boarded a C-130 military medical transport bound for Landstuhl, Germany. “It’s not the most comfortable thing you can ride on, but it works, probably the most efficient way to get people out of there,” she said. Tapley arrived back in the states Oct. 29, just 12 days after the



Tracey Tapley worked with teams that use mobile drill rigs, like the one pictured here, to drill and install drinking water wells. Tapley and her team start by drilling 1,500-foot borings penetrating below the water table to pinpoint the “good” water. Once complete, the wells not only provide clean drinking water, but they eliminate the need for convoys to travel over dangerous roads to deliver potable water. (Photo courtesy of Tracy Tapley)

incident.

She says right now, she’s trying to get back to work, in the swing of things and back to where she was before she got shot. “I just have to be slower at things to make sure I don’t hurt myself.” Tapley even said that once she’s well, she would consider returning to Afghanistan.

In February, Tapley returned to work at the district doing what she loves. When asked how this has changed her, she replied, “Not too much. It’s not like I was in the middle of the firefight or something. It’s just something that happened. Move on.”

Building a vital link



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cargo to forward-deployed soldiers, Marines, airmen and coalition partners. The project was featured in the last issue of Desert Times (view it online at www.sas.usace.army.mil/desert/page1.html). Myers said the airfield consists of four parts that increase operational capability: the paved runway, a rotary wing helicopter apron and taxiways, an airlift apron for fixed wing parking, and a cargo handling area.

Myers (center) oversees construction of a concrete placement culvert airlift apron.

(Photos courtesy of James Myers)

District team member serves a crucial role in Afghanistan

The Savannah district continues to play a key role in Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO); close to 200 Savannah district civilian employees have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since September 11, 2001. Today, 44 of our district colleagues—engineers, safety officers, project managers and administrative support are deployed in support of OCO, including Executive Secretary Nancy Gill. She serves as the Administrative Support Specialist for the Afghanistan Engineer District-North (AEN) commander, a role that is not foreign to her. Gill began her government career out of high school with an assignment at Fort Stewart in 1974, and has been part of the Savannah district team since 1979 – more than 30 years of service with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corporate Communications Office interviewed Gill about her decision to deploy and the role she serves in Afghanistan.

1) What is your job in Afghanistan?

When I first deployed in July 2010, I was hired to work in the Real Estate Office with many of the deployees from the Savannah district. In October 2010, the Commander's Administrative Support Specialist redeployed unexpectedly, and her position was recruited for internally. I applied and was hired to fill that position in the Executive Office. I work at Qalaa House in AEN, which is the district's headquarters in Kabul, Afghanistan, in the north eastern part of the country.

2) How does it compare to what you did here in the district?

My current position is very different, since I work with all the services – Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines. Service members from all these branches are under the combined forces throughout AEN and report to our commander, Col. Thomas Magness. I work more in a “military world environment” which is not always the way it is in a U.S. district environment. I've had to learn military acronyms I never used in the 30-plus years I've worked for USACE.

3) What made you decide to deploy for your original 6-month tour?

I felt in my heart that I was needed there. I had many of the skill sets required to be productive, and I still had much to offer and learn before retirement. Several years ago, I wanted to deploy to Iraq, but the timing has to be right in someone's life and career when considering deployment. My mother was in poor health and was unable to live alone. To deploy at that time was not a good fit for me or my family. She passed away a few years ago, my kids are grown, my husband is in good health, so the timing was right this time.

4) Why have you made the decision to add another year to your assignment?

It is often said in Afghanistan that the days are long but the weeks are short. Six months went by in a blink of an eye for me. There is still much to be done, and I want to be a part of it and share those successes. AEN has a \$5 billion program this fiscal year. That is groundbreaking and may never happen again for a USACE district! How many people can say they were part of a program of that size and magnitude?

5) What was your family's reaction?

My family has been supportive from the very start. I come from a long line of family members with service connections both as civilians and active duty members. It has always been family first, with a great love, respect and dedication to this great nation of ours. I'm an Air Force brat, originally. My husband, Steve, and I have tried to continue those values and instill them in our children. Both of my kids work for the Corps of Engineers (Beth Hilliard in the Savannah district and my son Stephen in the New Orleans district), so I think we must have done something right. Beth deployed to Iraq June 27, 2004 and was the first to tell me she thought I was doing the right thing.



Nancy Gill deployed to the Afghanistan Engineer District-North (AEN) headquarters in Kabul, Afghanistan, in July 2010. She has extended her original six-month tour by one year. (Photo courtesy of AEN Public Affairs)

6) What would you say to someone who is considering an OCO deployment?

Do it! It's a great way to start, continue or end a career. Talk to others who have deployed and know what you are getting yourself into before you apply. Learn the risks as well as the rewards. The physical and medical requirements are making it more difficult for some people to qualify, so check those out as well. Pack only the necessities. Space is always an issue, and conditions are often remote. You will learn that you can live with much less than you ever thought you could. When you are deployed, you miss your family back home, but you build relationships with those that are deployed with you, and they become family as well. At the USACE Deployment Center (UDC), those relationships start before you ever leave with your battle buddies. When you return home for R&R or on a leave between taskers, you miss those you left behind as well. Have a support system at home and with your battle buddies, and never hesitate to ask for help if you need it.

7) Is there anything you'd like to add?

I want to thank my family, friends and coworkers. Without their love and support, I could never have done this. The people of Afghanistan are wonderful, loving and very friendly. I was happily surprised to learn that. The first time I was hugged by one of them, I felt such a sense of pride and encouragement that maybe something I did or said has made a difference in their lives and that they trust Americans. I work with many local nationals, and their customs and traditions are very different than ours, but they are not all terrorists as sometimes depicted in the media. They have a deep appreciation and dedication to family as I do, so I have found we can meet on common ground and build relationships and respect for one another from that experience. I pray that one day we can all live in peace but understand and appreciate our differences.

Military One Source extends service to qualified civilians

By SANDRA HUDSON

Established as a pilot program for the Marine Corps in 2002 and fully launched for all branches of service in August of 2005, www.militaryonesource.com was developed as a complete catalog of 24-hour information and counseling services for deployed service members and their families. Today, access to this web-based library of answers has been expanded to include the Department of Defense Civilian Expeditionary Workforce (CEW) and their immediate family members for 90 days prior to deployment and 180 days upon return.

Military One Source Program Manager, Dave Kennedy said they added the CEW as a group more than two months ago. "The questions came up and the feeling was that these folks are putting themselves in harm's way so it's the right thing to do," he said.

One hot topic that may interest many CEW users at this time of year is tax filing services through the basic H&R Block at Home electronic tax-filing product. Tax consultants are also available through a special Military One Source Tax Hotline.

A small sampling of services available through Military One Source includes assistance with:

- Personal and relationship matters
- Childcare and parenting
- Deployment and reunion
- Money matters
- Legal situations

The site offers a few different ways to find results—website access, calling a coordinator, or by e-mail. Military One Source representatives will either answer inquiries directly or connect clients with a counselor who specializes in a particular topic.

"We usually get the answer fairly quickly, depending on the issue," Kennedy said. "Over time we have built up a huge library of resources. Probably 95 percent of questions have been asked before." If not, researchers will be assigned to find answers not readily available, he said.

Anyone can browse the Military One Source website to get an idea of what's offered. Eligible users must then establish an account to use the services. To do so, log in to the website, scroll to the very bottom of the page and choose DoD Civilian Expeditionary Workforce.

From document translation and referral for home repair service to health coaching and a childcare locator, Kennedy said the services are abundant, but he's always looking for ways to improve. "We make it an interactive process," he said. "If you see anything you feel should be there let us know. We want to tailor this to the issues of most concern to our customers." Kennedy encourages families to surf the site together and see what's available before a deployment, so they'll have confidence and take full advantage of all Military One Source has to offer.



Technology brings families together



The district's Emergency Management Division and Family Readiness Network helped bring together three deployed teammates and some of their friends and family in a video teleconference (VTC) in December. Nancy Gill, Joyce Clark and Phillip Payne, deployed to Afghanistan in support of Overseas Contingency Operations, joined the call. After a few opening words from Lt. Col. David London, Savannah district deputy commander, the families spoke as a group, then had a chance to talk privately. The VTC was just another way the Family Readiness Network is helping families stay connected during deployment. (Photos courtesy of Paula Hanna)